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Trucks for Change Network bridges gap between charities, trucking companies

Not-for-profit group aims to see charitable donations get to where they're needed

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2011-11-01

TORONTO, Ont. - While it would seem like common sense that goods donated to charities eventually find themselves in the hands of those in need, many charitable donations are, in fact, routinely rejected and end up in a place most would find unthinkable: the dump.

It's a cruel reality brought on by a simple lack of affordable transportation to bring the goods where they're needed.

The problem, it turns out, is that that whole process of requesting equipment from trucking companies is inefficient, says Pete Dalmazzi, president and founder of the Trucks For Change Network, a not-for-profit group looking to bridge the gap between carriers and charities in need of their services.

"Every month, trucking companies receive dozens of requests from charities to do things like pick up donations and

distribute them to where they are needed. (Charities) also do a lot of great community social events and fundraising events across the country, so they need equipment," he says.

"It takes a lot of time for both parties, and the chances of the charities finding a trucking company who can help on any given day is fairly small. What we are trying to do is to bring some of the efficiencies to this process basically from the freight brokerage industry, which is a very efficient system in matching shippers' needs with available capacity from the trucking industry."

Dalmazzi constructed the idea of Trucks For Change Network following a 28-year career at Ryder Logistics. "I was looking for something that would be meaningful - an opportunity to give back...What eventually struck me was that I was fairly well positioned with my experience and with the people that I knew in the industry to try to do something with that and make a difference by relying on my past career, and bringing it to the not-for-profit industry."

So how does it work? The Trucks For Change Network consists of two groups: client charities and its members (trucking companies). The organization collects requests for service from its client charities and organizes them using a newly-launched technology called Movematrix, which allows charities and trucking companies to review open capacity and charitable requests, respectively.

"Offers will be made by our members to charity needs that they can accommodate, and if accepted, the work simply gets done, the products get moved and the transaction is completed," Dalmazzi says.

Trucks For Change charges its members an annual membership fee to use the system, while charities incur a "modest cost" for using the service.

In the future, Dalmazzi says the goal is to invite corporate sponsors from the transportation sector to become involved in the project. The benefits of using the Trucks For Change Network extend to both parties, says Dalmazzi.

For charities, which typically have small staffs and no logistics departments, Trucks For Change takes a lot of the grunt work out of transportation planning.

"That whole act of having to solicit trucking companies, they do not know where to start and it is a lot of work. What this allows them is sort of a one-stop shop for approaching trucking companies...for donations."

The affiliation with Trucks For Change also allows them to have better donor reach (the ability to solicit donations from a wider area) as well as keeping charitable goods away from the dump.

"By giving them an affordable transportation option, we basically allow them to say 'yes' more often," Dalmazzi says.

For trucking companies, they're able to make a contribution to their communities and do it in a cost-effective way.

"Forward-thinking companies...understand that in the future, stakeholders, investors, customers and employees are going to favour companies that give back and become involved in their communities and positive social initiatives," Dalmazzi says.

"I think there are going to be some important benefits for our members going forward by being involved in not only Trucks For Change, but similar initiatives."

Currently, the network includes 15 members that are among the largest trucking companies and for-hire motor

carriers in Ontario.

"We have received the endorsement of the Ontario Trucking Association, so we are inviting all OTA members to join forces with us," Dalmazzi says.

The group has been working with Habitat for Humanity since the pilot project's launch in late 2010, and, in addition to recent work with Food Banks Canada, Trucks For Change has garnered interest from childrens' charities, community development charities, health research charities and environmental and nature conservancy charities.

"There has been great interest, and we look forward to bringing a lot of them aboard in the near future," Dalmazzi says.

While in the near term, Trucks For Change is looking to build its membership base, in the future, the group may venture into asset donations, rental services, and driver and professional volunteer services, to become a one-stop shop for charities and the transportation industry.

For more information, visit www.trucksforchange.org.

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